

The Arrangement

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Summary: Mitsuru has what she considers a "satisfactory arrangement" with Akihiko, but she starts to rethink things after talking with her friend Minako (P3P female protagonist).

The Arrangement

He'd agreed to fight with her. It took awhile before she asked him to help her with the other matter, but once he'd understood, that was easy too. In some ways they had the perfect arrangement. She could rely on him, he was easy on the eyes, and he kept himself reasonably clean...for a man. She could have intelligent conversations with him. And of course, there was his endurance.

Ultimately, she adopted the term "sex friends." Occasionally he would insist on saying "fuck buddies." (She had to discipline him on those occasions.) But the one thing they never did was let the slightest hint drop to anyone else that they were anything more than team-mates. And for a long time, no one thought it was strange that these two people treated each other with relative indifference when everyone else in the school was falling all over themselves trying to get their attention.

Then she came along.

\* \* \*

><p>Mitsuru bit her bottom lip as she considered Arisato's question. For a brief moment, she had the mad impulse to say "Actually, we're fuck buddies," but she managed to shake it off. Instead, she stumbled around for a good term before emphatically telling her friend they were "team mates, nothing more." The girl wasn't convinced, she could see that. But Minako was a good friend, and she took Mitsuru's answer at face value.<p>

Later that night, Mitsuru was still thinking about it.

Akihiko clearly only had one thing on his mind, so it was rather difficult to get him to focus. Their conversation ended up happening in fits and starts.

"Have you ever been in love?"

"...huh?" Akihiko came up for air. "Come again?"

Mitsuru sighed. "I said, have you ever been in love?"

"Well yeah, I love you."

"I don't mean friends."

"Right..."

"Look, put it another way. Do you wish to marry me one day?"

Mitsuru felt his muscles tense. Akihiko looked to the side and grunted, "That kind of thing, is a little..."

"Exactly." Mitsuru nodded. "You would hate being married to me. Or rather, to my family. In any case, since you have no intention of marrying me, it means you and I have no future." Akihiko looked a little hurt, so she quickly added "...as lovers. Of course I hope we will always be friends."

Akihiko relaxed a bit, she was relieved to see. "Yeah okay, but what's all this nonsense about getting married anyway? Why would I ever even want to get married?"

Mitsuru looked distant. "The other day a friend of mine said marriage is about love...that you want to marry the person you love. You may feel that way one day..." Akihiko was about to ask who this nosy friend was when Mitsuru cut him off. "What if I were to tell you I know a girl who's in love with you?"

"Well that wouldn't be anything new." He didn't even say it arrogantly, it was just how things were at their school.

"I don't mean those dreadful girls."

Akihiko sighed. "Okay I'll bite, who?"

"A girl even you would look at..." Mitsuru considered for a moment. "...someone...brave. And...strong."

"Sure you don't mean you?" He kissed her shoulder.

"Akihiko." Mitsuru used her chilliest voice. "Look me in the eye."

Akihiko straightened up and looked at her intently. Instead of feeling impatient, Mitsuru suddenly felt awkward. She fidgeted slightly.

Thankfully, he raised an eyebrow and broke the tension. "Yeah okay, you clearly ain't in love with me...so who's this ideal woman you want me to know about?"

Mitsuru drummed her fingers on his ribs thoughtfully, then made her decision. "...I'd better not say."

"Oh c'mon, why? Scared I'll run off?"

"Don't be silly." She paused. "Well...in a way, perhaps."

He raised his eyebrows again.

Mitsuru huffed. "Don't get any ideas. It's just, we have a good thing going, right? Mutually satisfying, I mean."

"I'll say."

She rolled her eyes. "Yes. Well. I don't want to just throw it away. You see, I'd be willing to end our arrangement if I knew you were in love. But you have to go out there and fall in love for yourself, I'm not going to do it for you."

"So you won't tell me who it is."

"No, I think I won't. If it's meant to be, you'll notice."

Akihiko looked amused. "Well that clinches it. I never notice any of that relationship stuff. You're stuck with me."

"Perish the thought."

\* \* \*

><p>The weeks went by. Akihiko kept it in the back of his head that there was someone who Mitsuru believed was in love with him, someone she evidently approved of enough to endanger their arrangement as she called it. But nobody really stood out...all the lovestruck girls he encountered were of the "dreadful" variety.</p>

Then one night in Tartarus, he saw it.

He was fighting, doing all right, they had it on the ropes. He turned to Minako (by now they mostly thought of her as Mina) to suggest they finish it off together. He caught her eye, she was already watching him.

Akihiko froze. The shadow saw its opportunity and the next thing he knew, he was down. Somewhere past the pain in his head, the shadow was screaming its last, and then he saw the familiar penny loafers cross his swimming vision and he heard her speak.

"Senpai, you idiot...don't scare me like that."

He looked up then, and knew he wasn't wrong. It was there, the thing that hadn't been in Mitsuru's eyes.

A girl even you would look at.\_

Mitsuru watched them. I suppose even a dolt like him was bound to notice eventually,\_ she thought. But perhaps I helped, a tiny bit. The thought made her happy and sad at the same time. After all, they were her friends and she loved them both. But, she supposed, it was

only natural to feel a little wistful at the loss of such a convenient arrangement.

Well, there was nothing for it now.

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><p>His visits stopped. Then, one night, she was surprised to hear his knock. She only had to look at him to see he was terrified of hurting her or treating her poorly. Mitsuru had to smile. "Akihiko, what's that face? Don't look as if your dog died."<p>

"You leave Koromaru out of this."

"Dummy. . .are you really that concerned? I told you that if you fell in love, I'd consent to end our arrangement."

"If you're sure." he paused, perhaps waiting to see if she'd fight for it, tell him to stay after all.

Mitsuru only smiled again. After a moment, he nodded and left.

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><p>Much later, Akihiko was grateful for the time he'd had with Minako. To love someone and be loved in return...it had been one of the best experiences of his life. Even if the thought of her hurt sometimes, he wouldn't trade the pain for anything. Minako had loved whole-heartedly and he felt privileged to be one of the people she touched in this life.<p>

But now he was on his own, and there was work to be done. He was doing it for her as much as anyone.

As Akihiko neared his destination, he smiled at the thought of seeing Mitsuru again. It had been awhile. She only seemed to get better with age, not that they were much older. But it'd be nice to catch up. Somehow after high school they'd been closer in one sense and more distant in other ways. It made him a little sad, when he had the time to think about it. He didn't often have the time.

When the moment came, and she stood there regarding him and trying to conceal her distaste (he supposed he looked a little rough), he found himself looking at her quietly and remembering. She started to speak again, and then paused.

Mitsuru looked at Akihiko. And she saw something that had always been there, but that she'd never, until this moment, recognized. Minako had tried to help, she realized. But in the end, she'd had to find it for herself.

Akihiko widened his eyes. He saw it too.

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